

Fashion blogs and advertisement

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Supervisor Olli Laintila <p>This thesis examines advertisement in fashion blogs. The theoretical part of the research discusses blogs and the social media in general, analyzes the decision-making process of the fashion consumer, along with general consumer behavior, and then examines ethical issues and the various advertising and marketing tools used in blogs.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis is to ascertain how blog readers are reacting to the growing amount of advertisement currently present in fashion blogs and the social media. It also aims to examine the power of a successful blog and the opportunities and issues that such a blog might create.</p> <p>The empirical part of the study was implemented as a survey. To fully understand the entirety of the subject matter being researched, it was seen as necessary to implement both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The survey was in the form of a web page, which was introduced to respondents through Facebook; it received a total of 50 responses.</p> <p>The survey indicated that readers are not that satisfied with the amount of advertisement in fashion blogs. Many respondents felt that blogs simply contain too much of it. They do not always feel that bloggers are clear enough as to when a post is an advertisement and when it is not. The survey also indicated that bloggers actually have a lot of power and are able to change a reader's mind regarding a particular product, potentially inducing her or him to buy it.</p>	
Key words Advertisement, fashion blogs, marketing, social media, consumer behavior	

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1 Introduction

The thesis is about fashion blogs and how readers perceive all the advertisement in them that has rapidly increased over the years. This has been a very current subject for a couple of years now and it is still going strong. In Finland blogging has not been popular for such a long time, but nowadays new blog portals are opening all the time and there are quite a few very famous Finnish bloggers.

Companies see new opportunities to market themselves in blogs. Collaborations are very common these days. Every famous blogger has a company or many companies that they are working with. From these collaborations some have had the chance to create their own clothing lines for example. The blogger and the company both benefit from these kinds of collaborations.

This subject is fascinating, because reading blogs is what a lot of people do. To some it is like an addiction, it must be checked if the blogger has updated something new on the blog.

Sweden was first with major blog-mania and some of the first bloggers that started in Sweden now have many companies and are really making money out of it. It is interesting how a person just by writing about his/hers daily life can be so attractive to a lot of people and make money out of it.

The advertisement perspective in blogs is changing. Companies are more and more influencing what the bloggers are writing about. Banners on the sides, links to their favourite products, hints about sales codes and secrets sales, tips about their favourite makeup and recommendations about online shopping sites are just a few examples of what goes on.

Since social media is so powerful these days, companies have limitless possibilities with blogs. They can send their products to the blogger and hope that she/he likes it and

makes a post about the product. The only cost for the company is the product itself, no marketing costs.

1.1 Research aims

The purpose of this study is to:

- Explore advertising in fashion blogs and how it affects the reader
- Find out why fashion blogs are interesting and why they are being read
- Examine the potential of social media
- Study consumer behaviour and the decision process for fashion consumers
- Inspect different kinds of marketing tactics and blog related companies
- Review ethical issues and advertising related problems

In the end the results of the survey will be described and analysed. Conclusions of the survey will be expressed and the future of blogging will be discussed.

1.2 Research questions

The research questions in this thesis are:

- How do the readers react to advertisement, is it perceived as positive or negative and why
- Why the readers read fashion blogs
- Do the readers buy the products that the bloggers advertise

2 Blogs

This chapter will discuss what a blog is and the history of blogging. The opportunities that blogging creates and examples of this will be examined.

2.1 What is a blog

A blog can be defined as a webpage that is modified frequently, has entries that are dated and then listed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs have become popular because it is easy to use and have the potential to reach out to all that use the web. (Tremayne, Herring, Scheidt, Kouper & Wright 2007, 3)

A blog contains *blog posts*. A blog post is an item that is posted to the blog by the person who is writing the blog, in other words, the *blogger*. The blogger is the one who is writing and maintain the blog. (Wright 2006, 7)

Video blogging, or “vloggin” is becoming more and more popular. Bloggers do video blog post sometimes when they want to show how good a product works or just to babble about everyday things. Some bloggers do only video blogging posts. Video blogging is a great way to show the readers a little bit more about themselves. It gives them more of a “human” feeling and they become more relatable. It also gives companies a great opportunity to show how a product works in the hands of a “real human being”. This makes the reader trust the product more and the reader will possibly buy the product more easily.

From big to small companies to regular people, everyone is blogging these days. The possibilities are endless with a blog. Some are using the blogs to influence customers, provide a discussion forum or to make experiences that are positive. (Wright 2006, 8)

2.2 History of the blog

Blogs have been around for quite some time. The earliest blogs have been around from when the Internet was invented. The first webpage ever created was like a blog. The creator of the Internet, Tim Berners-Lee, updated it regularly with a register of the websites that existed. (Wright 2006, 11)

After a while blogging evolved into sharing personal thoughts and other information. Until 2004 there were only approximately 5 million bloggers over the world. They were fairly withdrawn to their own niches for example business blogs and pet blogs. In 2004 when the US presidential elections were held the blogs suddenly got mainstream attention. Bloggers started blogging about candidates and other events that the regular journalist did not write about. In 2004 many highly respected business people for example Tom Peters (management guru) and Guy Kawasaki (entrepreneurial expert) started to realize the power that a blog had. Many respected business magazines, for example, Fortune and Business 2.0, also realized what was happening. (Wright 2006, 12)

2.3 Chiara Ferragni – The Blonde Salad

With over 350.000 likes of Facebook, over 200.000 followers on Bloglovin' numerous collaborations with different brands and with an award winning blog, Chiara Ferragni, 25 years old, has one of the biggest fashion blogs in the world. She started her blog in October 2009. After only two years running the blog had 110.000 hits daily, over 800.000 unique visits a month and 12.000.000 impressions a month. (The Blonde Salad 2009-2012)

She started her shoe line called Chiara Ferragni in 2010 and her first collection hit the stores in September 2010. Now three shoe collections later, Chiara has created capsule collections for the brands Yamamay and Mango. The Yamamay collection was a bestseller worldwide. Other brands that she has collaborated with are: Dior, Luis Vuitton, Tommy Hilfiger, Easyjet, Yves Saint Laurent, Hugo Boss, Valentino,

Victoria's Secret, Burberry, Furla, Lancome, Nikon, Ermenegildo Zegna, Bulgari, Rolls-Royce and many more. (The Blonde Salad 2009-2012)

It is possible to make something of oneself by starting a blog. The opportunities are endless if your blog succeeds. Some even do it as a job. Chiara Ferragni is just one of many who have made it as a blogger.

2.4 Blogging creates opportunities

If a blogger manages to create a popular blog, with many followers, it is possible to do it for living. According to an article on Yle.fi, a poll was made by a marketing company called Manifesto which concluded that in 2013, 71 % of bloggers stated that they make money by blogging. In 2012 the number was 42%. Only in one year, an increase of 29 % developed. Most of the bloggers make approximately a couple of hundreds of euros a month, but with the right companies and the right partners a blogger can make 10.000 euros a month. (Toivanen 2013)

Anna Vanhanen, who writes a famous fashion blog called Mungolife made 31.000 € in 2011. Jenni Rotonen, who is the writer of Pupulandia fashion blog, made 38.000 € in 2011 and fashion blog, Nelliinan Vaatehuone, which is written by Niina Tapojärvi, made a staggering 45.000 € in 2011. (Väisänen, 2012)

3 Consumer behavior

This chapter will examine the fashion consumer's behavior when purchasing a product or service. The process will be described and the new environment, consumerspace, will be introduced.

Consumer behavior can be defined as "It is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires". (Solomon 2013, 31)

When a company understands the behavior of the consumer the company will make money. When making a marketing plan a company should always think about incorporating knowledge of the consumer into it. By doing that, the organizations can more easily identify threats and define the target market. Since nothing lasts forever, the knowledge helps to make sure, that it continues to attract the target market. (Solomon 2013, 33)

3.1 Consumerspace

A usual criticism that marketing faces is that organizations convince people that they are in need of plenty of material things. If the consumers do not buy these things, they will not be happy and they will be inferior to others, and only by buying these products they will be satisfied. The time when organizations were in charge and determined what the customers wanted to do and know is gone. (Solomon 2013, 45)

Consumerspace is the new environment where people command organizations what kind of merchandise they want, how they want it and where and when they would like to learn of the merchandise. How the consumer searches for information on a product and how the consumer classifies alternative brands can be linked to the changes that are happening in the behavior of the consumer. (Solomon 2013, 45-46)

3.2 The decision process for fashion consumers

Fashion changes all the time. Nowadays the process from the item being introduced, to adopted, to already being out of style is much more faster than it used to be.

(Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 8)

This has created a new kind of need for the consumer. As humans, we are born with psychological needs. A real need for a product might not even exist but a want for a product is often more powerful. A pair of warm winter gloves, to protect us from the element of cold, is a psychological need, because we need them so that the cold does not give us frostbite, for example. (Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 60)

A want is more of a choice. We can have a lot of choices even if we are buying one product. A plain white shirt for example, you could buy a cheap one at H&M, or a mid-priced shirt at Zara or you could buy an expensive shirt at Stockmann. Usually our choice is limited to what we can spend on the shirt, but also the need to cover up or body. When studying, a person usually does not have that much money to spend and the amount of choices to satisfy the needs are not there, because of limitations to the budget. (Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 61)

Since fashion changes all the time, the industry depends on the so called planned obsolescence. This occurs when a person feel a need to have something better and newer, before it is necessarily needed. Designers, retailers and marketers needs us to think that we need new items, since the ones we bought and wore last year are not adequate anymore. (Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 62)

Nowadays there are so many different brands which offer almost the same products. It makes it quite difficult to know, which brands jacket for example, is the best. If a customer does not find the answers to which one is more superior to the other from looking into own past experiences, the next step would be to make an external search. This comprises of compiling information from family, peers, the marketplace, a magazine, a television show or a blog for example. Executing external searches is more

common for those who love and are excited about fashion. (Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 65)

A public source is an article in a magazine, a blog post in a blog or a TV report for example. These sources are usually considered neutral since the control over an article is not in the hands of the retailer, designer or manufacturer. (Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 66)

A search that takes place when not purchasing anything specific is called ongoing search. This means that information is regularly absorbed, for example by reading magazines or fashion blogs, by going to the mall and window shopping. All the information that is collected is usually stored in the mind of the consumer and when a specific purchase is needed the consumer will have the information available through what is called internal search. (Yurchisin & Johnson 2010, 66)

4 Social media

This chapter will examine different social media outlets that bloggers and blog readers can benefit from.

Digital revolution has significantly influenced consumer behavior. Nowadays we use Twitter and Facebook on our mobile phones every day. It is possible to buy products with your mobile phone online 24/7 and you can read your daily magazine with it too. (Solomon 2013, 42)

A blog could be said to be a community where people meet to discuss different things. The activity in a blog could be described as consumer-to-consumer e-commerce. A fashion blog is, for example, a place where a blogger is writing about fashion and the readers read the blog because they are interested in fashion. The dialog between the blogger and the reader is usually done by commenting on a post. The blogger can ask the readers if they have any experience of, for example, a specific curling iron, which creates discussion. The readers recommend it or not, or they have something different in mind than the original product that the blogger was thinking about. (Solomon 2013, 42)

This decade's biggest marketing sensation is said to be user-generated content. Normal people tell their opinions on blogs, Facebook, Twitter, podcasts and YouTube about brands, products and companies. The Internet is not the same any more. It is more of a social and interactive medium, rather than a one-way transmittal between consumers and producers that it used to be. (Solomon 2013, 43)

4.1 Bloglovin'

The idea behind Bloglovin' is that it allows and makes it easier for the user to follow and discover their preferred blogs. Currently Bloglovin' has over 2 million users. (Bloglovin')

Bloglovin' was founded in Stockholm, Sweden, by five partners. It all began with doing websites and the second project, a community for fashion lovers, was failing. Feedback was needed, so they asked some fashion bloggers if they could help them. One blogger that decided to help them was a woman called Carolina Engman. When she was checking if any of the blogs that she liked to read, had updated any new post, she had to open a new window for every blog that she was checking. (Bloglovin')

Here is where the idea of Bloglovin' began. To make something easier and not so technical as the other blog readers. After two weeks, Bloglovin' was up and running. The basic idea behind Bloglovin' is to sign up. Then you can get alerts when your favorite blogger has posted something new on their blog. If a blogger signs up, she/he can put a "follow me" button on the blog which then links to Bloglovin' so that the "followers" can see when something new is posted. Bloglovin' works with a computer, Android, Iphone and Ipad. (Bloglovin').

Every major fashion blogger uses Bloglovin'. It makes the blog more visible and out there for the readers and can also attract new readers. Fashiontoast.com, theblondesalad.com, fashionsquad.com and oliviapalermo.com all use Bloglovin' (these blogs were in the top 15 of fashion blogs everywhere on September 19th 2013). (Bloglovin')

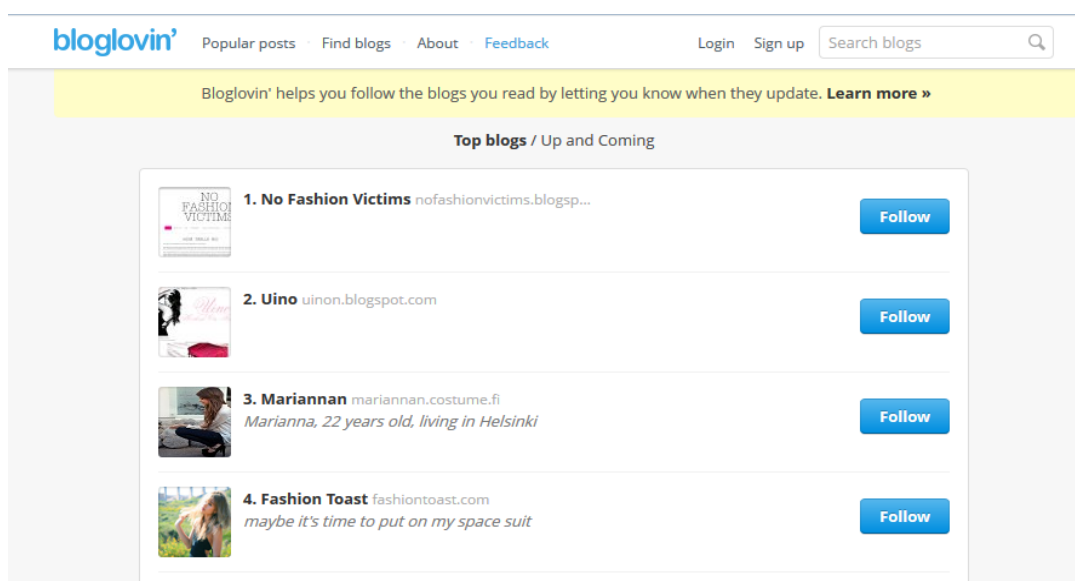


Figure 1. Top Fashion blogs on Bloglovin'



Figure 2. Example of Bloglovin' widget

4.2 Facebook

The more popular bloggers have created a Facebook profile for their blog. By doing so the blogger makes sure that the blog gets the most attention that a blog can get, the more attention - the more possible readers. Some bloggers have special campaigns, for example lotteries, on their Facebook that are not on their blog. The lottery usually requires that the reader Likes the page or writes a comment. This appears in the Facebook sidebar or in the newsfeed, which means that all the friends of the reader see this and might wonder what it is. This is great way to create interest and a chance to get new readers that continue to read the blog.

4.3 Fashiolista

Fashiolista is a fashion community that is active all over the world. Fashiolista has over 1.5 million members, 3 million visitors and 50.000 bloggers are using Fashiolista. It offers different widgets for blogs. The idea is that when a person sees something that they like on the internet, they can, by pressing the "love" widget button, put a collage of the things that they like on their blog. Then others can see what you love and Fashiolista users can "love" it too. Over 50 stores and brands are partners with Fashiolista, for example TopShop, ASOS, Nelly.com, H&M and Mango. It is also possible to follow bloggers, which means that when someone you follow adds something that they "love" a notice is sent. (Fashiolista 2013)

It is not necessary to have a blog. It is possible to just be a member and “love” things. Fashiolista creates awareness for a company by creating different kinds of competitions or events. “Love your style” contest for example, Fashiolista asks its members to choose the items that they like the best from a companies’ collection. The goals for this kind of competition would be to get traffic, signups for newsletters, brand awareness and engagement. Other opportunities that they offer are giveaways, styling contest and events. Famous bloggers that are using Fashiolista are The Blonde Salad, 5Inchandup and Strictly Style, just to mention a few. (Fashiolista 2013)

4.4 Blogging portal – Indiedays

In 2010 Indiedays blogging portal was launched. Even though some bloggers had a lot of readers they did not benefit financially from blogging. The idea behind Indiedays was to create a community of bloggers that could benefit financially from the income that advertisements would provide them. (Indiedays, 2012)

Every blog works by itself. Indiedays is the bloggers partner and helps it to get new readers. Indiedays pays their bloggers for the posts that they are writing and in the other hand Indiedays gets paid for selling advertisement space and by offering collaborations to their advertisement partners. (Indiedays, 2012)

Currently Indiedays have 30 fashion and lifestyle blogs. These blogs are the most popular blogs in Finland. Bloggers Annika O (<http://annika-o.indiedays.com/>) and Uino (<http://uino.indiedays.com/>) are at numbers 4 and 5 at Bloglovin’s most popular blogs in Finland, both have over 6500 followers. Indiedays also has 300 Indiedays Inspiration blogs. These bloggers have been invited to join Indiedays because of their inspirational and professional content. (Indiedays 2012 & Bloglovin’)

5 Ethical issues in blogs

This chapter will discuss ethical issues in the blog world. An example of an ethical issue will be given.

While studying blogging portals, MyCosmo and ReFashion, there was no mention about ethical principles. Blogging portal Lily.com's ethical principles link did not even work. Indiedays was the only one with a very comprehensive information section.

A blogger has the right to freedom of speech by telling her/his opinions about services and products. When a blogger has received products, which have been send to him/her by a company who wants the blogger to advertise their products, is not obligated to write about the products, unless the company and the blogger have an agreement about it. (Indiedays 2012)

As a blogger it is important to take ethical issues into account. As the Finnish competition and consumer authority states, advertisement should be in good taste. If a blogger for example receives alcohol from a company and they have an agreement that the blogger must write about the products, it will probably create a discussion. Is the blogger sending a message that drinking is all right, even though the blogger have underage readers. Is it because the blogger wanted free alcohol for a party and that was the only way to get it, or is it because the blogger really consider the drink as her favorite. This could also be done because provocation creates discussion and by that the blogger gets more attention and possible new readers. (Kilpailu ja Kuluttajavirasto 2013)

As an example a known Finnish fashion blogger called Mungolife, wrote in her blog about her birthday party that she had "*For drinks we had some ciders and this great sparkling wine, that's one of my definite favourites in sparklings called Cono Sur*". (Mungolife 2013, <http://www.rantapallo.fi/mungolife/2013/09/10/birthday-celebrations/>)

This post created quite a discussion on her blog. Most of the comments were quite negative, pointing out that she had gotten everything for free for the party and that it

was not stated clear enough in the post. The other half thought that the readers who had left negative comments were just jealous. (Mungolife 2013)

6 Advertisement in fashion blogs

This chapter will examine marketing and advertisement in fashion blogs. Different advertisement tools, the law regarding advertisement in blogs and issues related to this will also be discussed.

6.1 Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing is said to be the most profitable way for a blogger to advertise. Affiliate marketing is when a blogger for example links to products in the posts. The link move the reader to an online shop and when a reader purchases a product the blogger gets a percentage of the total amount that the reader has spent. The worth of affiliate marketing in Finland last year was 14 million euros, of which approximately 7 million euros is believed, to have come from bloggers (Toivanen 2013)

Affiliate marketing could be compared to a sales team. The partners, the blogger and the online shop for example, create a virtual sales team which receives compensation depending on the results. (Fogelholm, 2012, 105)

Affiliate marketing was brought to Finland by the Swedish company TradeDoubler. TradeDoubler in Finland has thousands of online services, from blogs to the largest sites in Finland that belong to their advertisement network. The advertiser has the power to choose with whom they will work with. Other affiliate marketing companies that operate in Finland are Tradetracker, NetBooster Affiliate, Zanox, SmartResponse, Euroads and Commission Junction. (Fogelholm, 2012, 107)

6.2 Display marketing

Display marketing, or banners, are different kinds of advertisements, that usually are present on a webpage. They can be of different shapes, static pictures or moving pictures. In the last few years, larger advertisements spaces on webpages have become more common. When a person has clicked on the banner, the banner typically leads to

a campaign site or a site that gives more information about the product. Banner advertisement is also criticized. The so called “banner blindness”, the lack of efficiency and the bad navigation of the traffic are the most criticized points. (Järvilehto, 2012, 97)

The banners that are the most successful and which receives the most clicks, are usually a banner with a competition, price or sale offers, banners that are in the middle of the content, large banners, banners where the brand is easily recognized, banners that have both pictures and text and the ones that take over the webpage. (Järvilehto, 2012, 99)

6.3 Advertisement and the law

The Finnish law states that an advertisement must be easily recognisable as an advertisement. It is against the law to hide commercial messages in other contents. If a free product or a free service has been sent to the blogger and the blogger writes about the product or service in the blog, it is considered to be an advertisement. If a blogger has received a payment or other form of reward, it is also considered as advertisement.

If a blog post includes an advertisement it must be informed to the reader. This can be done by simply stating that the product or service has been given for free or as a loan. Another way to do it is by telling that they are involved in a marketing campaign with the advertiser. (Indiedays 2012 & Kilpailu ja kuluttajavirasto 2013)

6.4 Issues with free products

Bloggers get free products sent to them, some receive a lot. In 2010, in Sweden, a big scandal regarding bloggers and the free products erupted. The Swedish tax authorities demanded bloggers to pay taxes for the products that were sent to them in commercial intention. According to the Swedish tax authorities, it is seen as income, and that is why the blogger should pay taxes for it. In 2005 the law that demanded everyone to

pay taxes for gifts was removed. The bloggers defended themselves, by saying it is gifts that they are receiving. (Mattsson, 2010)

The Swedish tax authorities have clearly stated rules on what is calculated as income and what is not. Selling products through a blog is not different from selling product from an online shop. (Skatteverket, 2013)

Finland is lacking these kinds of rules and laws. It is going to be interesting to see, if in the future the Finnish tax authorities will be demanding Finnish bloggers to pay taxes for getting products.

6.5 New rules in the world of blogging

A proposal regarding new rules about advertisement in blogs is currently being drafted. A blog is becoming more and more like a magazine. All the things that we are used to finding in magazines such as fashion pictures, beauty tips, cosmetics reviews and pictures from fancy parties can be found in blogs. (Toivanen, 2013)

The Finnish Customer Marketing Association (Asiakkuusmarkkinointiliitto, ASML), Aller, Bonnier Publications, Indiedays blogging portal, Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority and A-Magazines are all co-operating in drafting the new proposal. The proposal is not going to be a must but a proposal for the industry. (Toivanen, 2013)

The proposal suggests that the blogger writes in the beginning of the post which products and what parts are from collaborating with a company. (Toivanen, 2013)

The blogger can also do it by clearly stating that the blogger is collaborating with company x or product x. If the blogger is being sponsored by a company it also has to be stated, for example, “has been sponsored by company x”. This can also be used when a blogger links to an online shop and receives payment for it. When a blogger recommends or reviews something, the blogger has to explain that the product has

been received from company x, has been given as a present/for free/to be reviewed or given as a loan or that the review has been produced together with company x.
(Toivanen, 2013)

7 The empirical study

This chapter will discuss the research case, qualitative- and quantitative research and validity and reliability. The outcome of the study will be announced.

7.1 The research technique

When doing a research project it is important to know what the goal is. A suitable method of research should be chosen for the research project. Qualitative research is usually linked with human behavior. It is stated that by doing a qualitative research it is possible to avoid statistical techniques and other mechanics that are connected with quantitative methods. Reliability and validity of a research are also relevant in every credible research. It is possible to combine methods of research, to document details by using qualitative research and by using the quantitative method to determine variance. (Silverman, 2005, 6-8)

7.2 Qualitative and quantitative research

A qualitative research requires methodological accuracy and theoretical sophistication. The quality of the research project is the key to success. It is important to be able to show what procedures have been used to insure the research methods were trustworthy and that the conclusions were valid. (Silverman, 2005, 209)

In qualitative research the data collected should be high quality data. Reliability indicates the consistency of the research. The investigator is compelled to document the procedure and be able to demonstrate consistency of the categories that have been used. (Silverman, 2005, 220, 224)

Quantitative research is all about numbers. Numbers are used in everyday life for simple or complicated calculations. It is necessary to know how to add, multiply, divide and subtract. In qualitative research it is important to know your numbers but also to

know how to interpret the numbers. Quantitative research studies a phenomenon via mathematical, statistical or computational approach. (Curwin & Slater, 2004, ix, 2-3, 8)

In quantitative research the procedure of measurement is fundamental, since it provides the connection between mathematical interpretation and empirical examination. Commonly, quantitative research is mainly used in economics, marketing, psychology and in political science. (Wikipedia, 2013)

7.3 Validity and reliability

It is argued by social researchers that the concern for validity and reliability only arises in quantitative research. The difference between social worlds and the natural world is not seen by the so called 'positivist' position. Social life and the valid and reliable measures of it are alone needed by aforesaid 'positivist'. (Silverman, 2005, 223)

Validity, or truth, is a key aspect in a respectable research project. The researcher must remain unbiased and be capable to accept contrary cases. It is important not to be exceedingly defensive. (Silverman, 2005, 210-211)

In this thesis both the qualitative and the quantitative methods have been chosen since it is about understanding and exploring the advertising phenomenon but also to understand in numbers how the readers are feeling. To be able to understand and analyze the results, it was needed to utilize both research methods. The survey contained many open questions which made it possible for the respondents to answer freely what was on their minds. Some of the results will be presented with simple charts which gives the research a quantitative feature.

7.4 The results of the advertisement in fashion blogs survey

To get the results that this study was looking for, a survey was created. The survey was a web based survey. It was possible to answer the survey by clicking on a link that led to the survey. The link was posted on my Facebook page and then shared and

answered by my friends. Five bloggers were contacted, if they would have been interested in sharing the survey on their blogs, but no one was unfortunately interested. The survey was mainly meant for women who have been reading fashion blogs for awhile and who already have some insight and opinions about the world of blogs.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions and three questions about the background of the answerer: Age, occupation and gender. The questionnaire was designed in a way that almost every question required an answer. Six of the questions were open. The answerer could write what she was thinking. Seven of the questions were “closed” questions where the answerer could choose from ready given answers. Three questions did not require an answer.

The questionnaire was done in English. One respondent answered in Finnish. All and all 50 persons answered the questionnaire.

As stated before, the questionnaire consisted of three background questions. The first one was age. This question was designed to see what the age of an average fashion blog reader was. The usual fashion blogger is between 17-30 years old. That is also the age that the reader is. 44% is between 20-24 years old and 24% is between 25-29 years old.

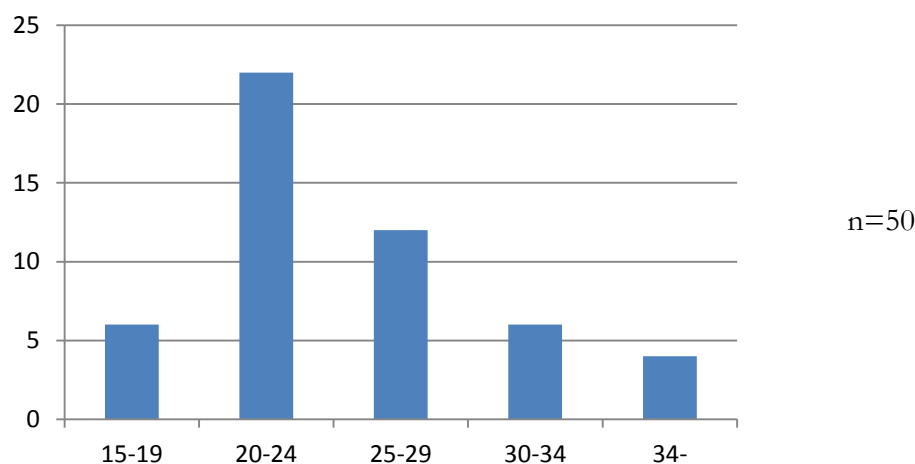


Figure 3. Age

The second question was occupation, this was an open question. This question was asked because the age of the average fashion blog reader is when a person is usually

studying. 21 persons answered that they are students. The other answers varied. Some examples were: assistant, confectioner, service advice agent, project assistant, café worker, bank worker, office worker, chef and journalist.

The third question was about gender. Since the usual fashion blog reader is a woman it was no surprise that almost everyone who answered were women. 94% were women.

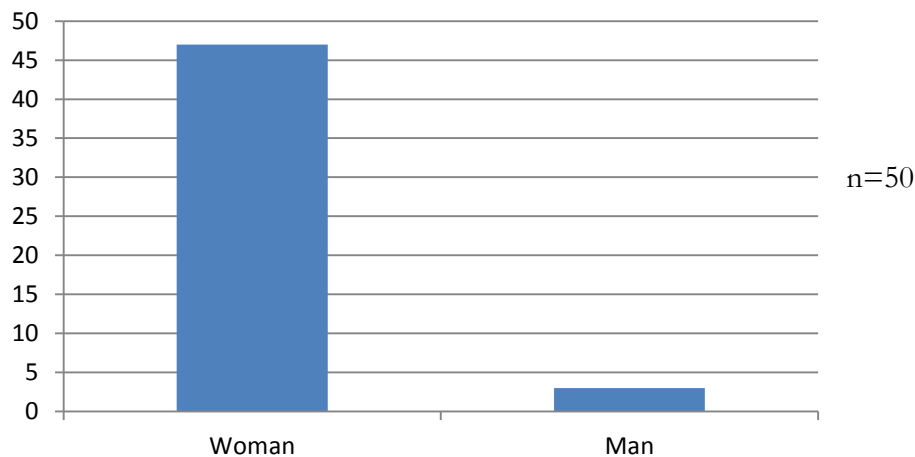


Figure 4. Gender

7.5 The questionnaire

As mentioned before the questionnaire consisted of 13 questions which were about blogs and advertisement.

1. Do you read fashion blogs?

This was a yes/no question. 90 % answered that they read fashion blogs and 10 % answered that they do not read fashion blogs.

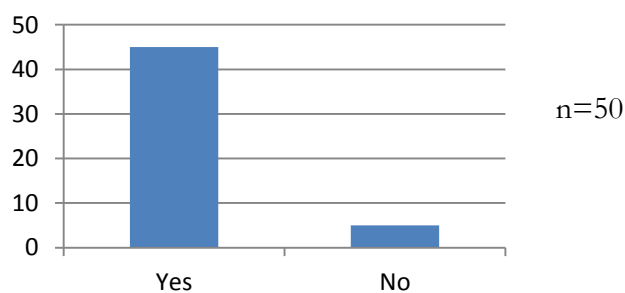


Figure 5. Do you read fashion blogs

2. How often do you read fashion blogs?

This question was a multiple choice question. The options were: everyday, 5 times a week, 3 times a week, once a week and once month. The usual fashion blog reader reads fashion blogs every day. 40 % answered that they read fashion blogs every day. Five times a week was the second answered with 24 %. It was quite surprising that the third one was once a month with 18 %. Once a week got 8 % and 3 times a week got 10 %.

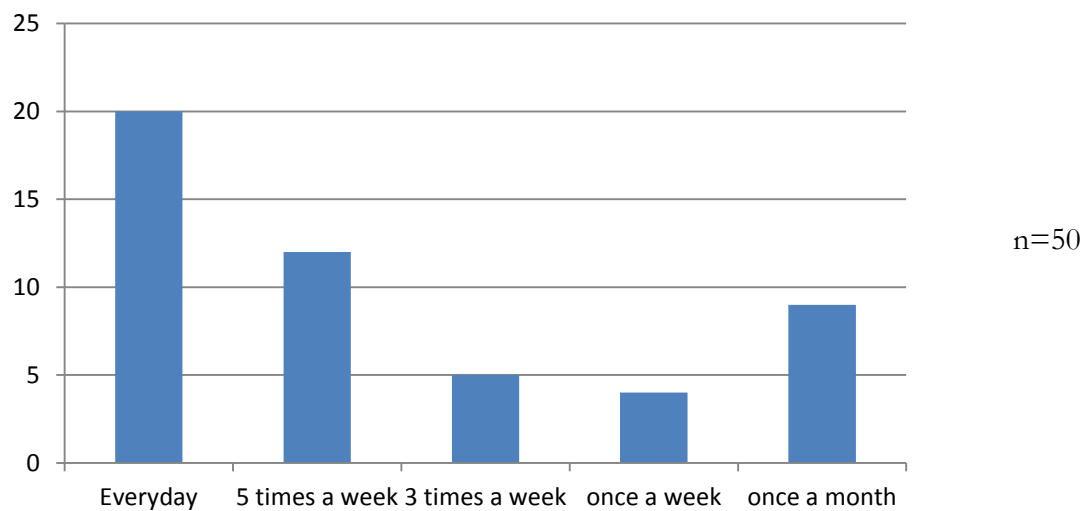


Figure 6. How often do you read fashion blogs?

This shows that people do not have time to read fashion blogs every day or at least do not prioritize them. The 18 % that read them once a month could be compared that they treat blogs as reading a magazine that comes out once a month. But since over half of the answerers read them quite frequently it is a good place to advertise products.

3. Why do you read fashion blogs?

This question was created to see why readers read fashion blogs. This was an open question which required an answer. The top answer was “to get inspiration”. 19 persons included inspiration to why they read blogs. The rest of the answers were also related to inspiration. Some of the comments were:

- *I like pretty pictures and sometimes they give good ideas to buy something*
- *Beautiful styles, clothes and pictures. Gives me inspiration*
- *Style inspiration, makeup advice, because blogger seems nice and fun and writes well*
- *Follow the trends, see good clothes sets/combination, look for ideas and insights, inspiration, check sales, offers*

Inspiration could be what the blogger is wearing, collages of favorite products or pictures of things that the blogger likes.

Because people read blogs to get inspiration it is quite obvious that companies want to advertise their products on blogs. If a person reads a blog and see an outfit that is to their liking they will try to copy it or even want to buy the same outfit or parts of it. This creates a huge market opportunity for companies. But there is also a problem with this. It will be discussed in question number eight.

Web store Nelly.com is very involved in advertising in almost every top blog. They also partner up with the top bloggers and let them choose their favorite outfits for free for example. Previously discussed Fashiolista is also a way to give the readers inspiration but also give companies advertising opportunities. Inspiration could in fact be anything from nail polish to beautiful hair. That is why so many companies from different fields could advertise on fashion blogs.

This could also be a problem, will the bloggers in the future only blog about products that they have received from companies for free. This would take away the “humanity” of the bloggers and create blogs that are full of advertisements. Unfortunately this phenomenon can already be seen in some blogs. This will also be discussed in upcoming questions.

7. What is/are your favorite fashion blog/blogs?

The question was asked to see if the Finnish “top bloggers” would dominate and be the most answered. These blogs are the ones with the most advertisement in them. The question was an open question and required an answer. Eight answered that they do not have a favorite.

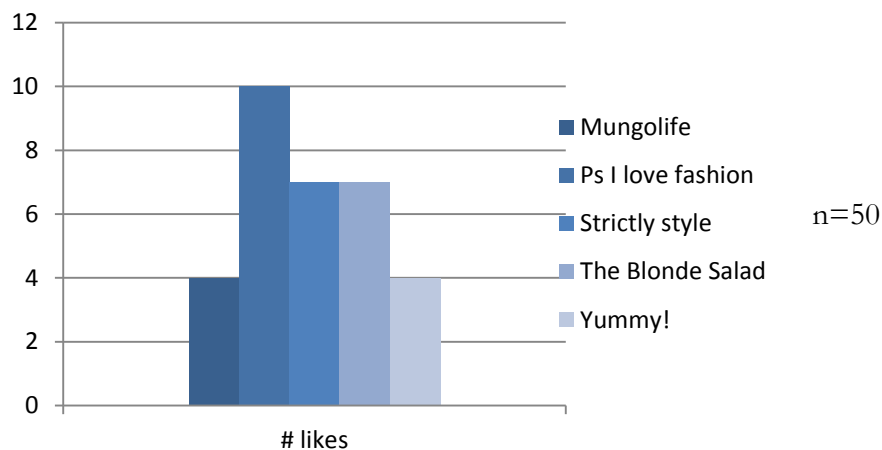


Figure 7. Most read blogs

The most read blog among the answerers was PS I love fashion. This blog is one of the most read blogs in Finland. An interesting notice was that bloggers Annika O and Uino which were mentioned earlier as the most read blogs according to Bloglovin', were only mentioned twice and Uino only one time.

Other blogs that were mentioned were: Sofis Snapshots, Nelliinan Vaatehuone, Pupulandia, No Fashion Victims, Ulrikke Lund, Blonde Rivets, LEHAPPY, Polka Dots, Alexa Dagmar, Pupulandia, Zoella, Rose Shock, Through the Looking Glass, Russian blogs, MouMou, Sincerely Jules, Stella Harasek, Style Plaza, Inhimillinen Turhamaisuus, Private Blend, 5 inch and up and Mariannan.

8. Do you like that bloggers advertise products on their blogs?

Question number eight was a yes/no question. 66 % answered that they like that bloggers advertise products and 34 % answered that they do not like it. The question was created to underlay for the upcoming questions, which are related to each other. A

majority liked that bloggers advertise products but quite many does not approve of it. This might be answered by the enormous increase in advertisement in the past years. The readers are getting tired of all the advertisements.

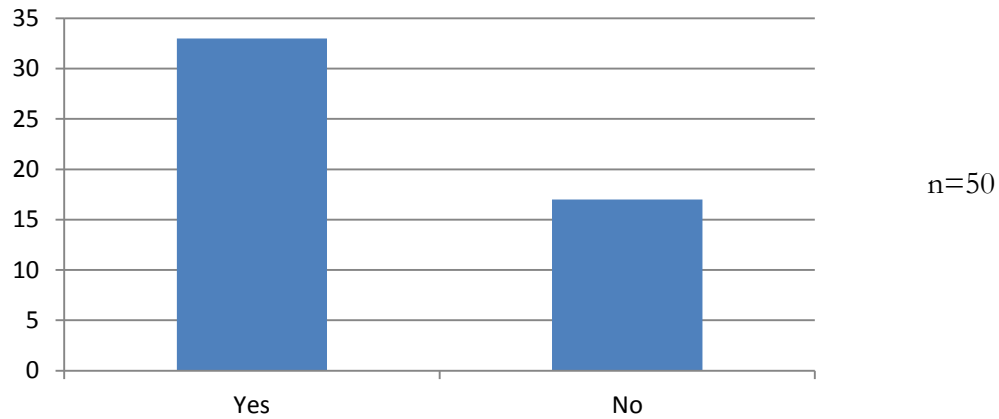


Figure 8. Do you like that bloggers advertise products on their blogs?

9. How often do you click on the links to the product(s) that the blogger is advertising?

The question was asked to see, if despite all the advertisement, the readers are interested in the links or advertisement that the blogger is posting about and do they trust the blogger and that the opinion of the blogger is not biased towards the company that is advertising.

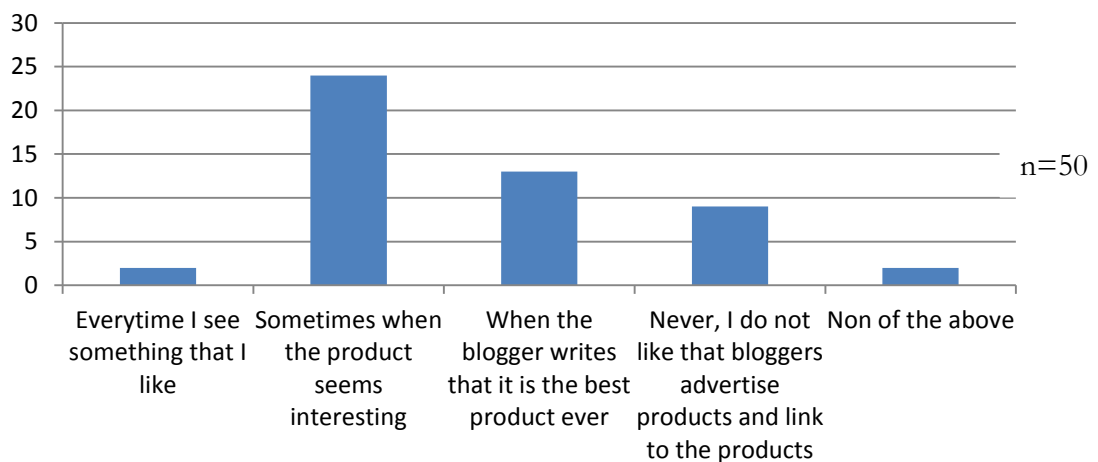


Figure 9. How often do you click on the links that the blogger is advertising?

4 % answered that they click on the links every time they see something that they like. 48 % which was the majority of the responders answered that they sometimes click, if the product seems interesting. What is interesting is probably different for everyone, but *how* the product is presented in the post, makes the difference between clicking and not clicking. 26 % answered that they click if the blogger writes that it is the best product ever.

When a blogger writes that it is the best product ever, the product has to be chosen wisely. The credibility of the blogger would decrease, if for example a product would be the best product ever once a week.

Usually “the best product ever” has something to do with hair or makeup. By analyzing different blogs, it is most often hair curlers or straighteners or moisturizers, foundations or eye shadows. A way to show the reader how good the product really is, is to, for example do a video blog post. This is often done if the blogger wants to show how amazing a curler for example is.

18 % of the respondents answer that they never click on the links since they do not like that bloggers link to products and advertise them. This is almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the readers. If bloggers start to advertise more and more, this reader category will probably stop reading.

4 % answered that non of the above mentioned examples suited their believes.

10. Have you bought a product that a blogger has written about and recommended in his/her blog?

As stated in a previous chapter, J. Wright composes that some companies are using blogs to influence customers. The tenth question was linked to the ninth question. 40 % have bought a product that a blogger has written about and recommended in the blog. In the question before, 48 % answered that they click on the link if the product seems interesting. An observation could be made that only 8 % do not buy anything from the link they have clicked, but 40 % do. 60 % of the respondents answered that they have not bought a product recommended buy a blogger.

The amount of respondents that have bought a product is very high. Almost half of the readers have bought something that a blogger has recommended.

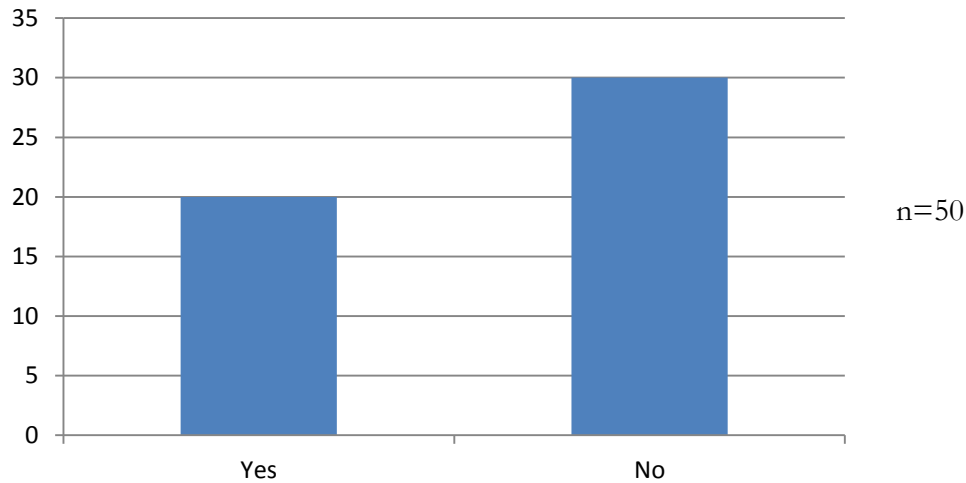


Figure 10. Have you bought a product that a blogger has written about and recommended in his/her blog?

11. If you have bought a product, what was it?

Question number eleven concluded what question number nine (How often do you click on the links to the product(s) that the blogger is advertising?) concluded. The products that the blogger writes that it is the best product ever is the ones that the reader buys. Question eleven was an open question and did not require an answer.

11 respondents out of 22 answered that they have bought makeup products, if a blogger has written about it and recommended it in the blog. That is 50 % of the respondents. Other answers that were given were hair products, clothes, hair care products and styling devices, skincare products, shoes, teeth whitening, food products and accessories. One of the respondents answered that she did not buy a product, in this case a bag, since the blogger said it was bad quality and that it helped her making the decision not to buy.

Makeup companies and other companies that sell products that have to do with ones' appearance have a lot of advertising potential since that is what the readers buy.

Since the readers buy the products that the blogger says that are very good, means that they do trust the bloggers opinion about the product. They are not “afraid” that the blogger is just writing about the products to get money or free products. This, again, proves the power that a blogger has.

12. Can you name companies that advertise on the blog/blogs that you read?

Question number 12 was an open question and it did not require an answer. The question was constructed to see if the advertisement that the respondents can name are the ones that they find most annoying. The most annoying advertisements will be discussed in question number 13.

The question got 36 answers and a staggering 26 out of the 36 respondents answered Nelly.com. Other companies that were mentioned were Lumene, Guess, Asos, Vero Moda, Nike, Björn Axén, Shienshade, Obh Nordica, H&M, Shopbob, Maybelline, Nokia, Essie, Lóreal, Ellos, Calvin Klein. Four of the respondents wrote that they could not name any.

The question got some comments too, regarding the advertisement. Some of the comments were:

- Nelly.com is in every blog, so annoying
- Nelly.com is everywhere

Nelly.com advertises in every major fashion blog and also in many small blogs. The readers remember Nelly.com advertisements so they have made an impact on the readers. As stated before, this question was linked to the next question and unfortunately Nelly.com was the most negatively commented company.

13. Do you find that some ads are especially annoying? Which one(s)?

Question number 13 was an open question and did not require an answer, the question got 29 answers. Out of the 29 answers 14 regarded Nelly.com. The question did also get some comments about the visual aspect of the advertisements. Some of them were:

- *Advertising banners are annoying if they are in between posts*
- *When the ad is huge and in every blog it is pretty annoying*
- *Anything big and flashy that does not fit the visual world of the blog*
- *If there's some irritating colors used in the ads*
- *Blinking ones, moving text etc.*

As stated before it is important *how* the product is presented and the readers value good presentation. This might even be the decision maker between to buy or not to buy.

Nelly.com got 14 comments out of 29. Almost 50 % consider Nelly.com advertisement annoying. Comments that this question received were:

- *Big collages with their favorite products from Nelly.com*
- *Nelly.com is everywhere*
- *Nelly.com's clothing advertisements and sales (Nelly.com vaatemainokset ja alennusmyynit)*
- *Nelly.com collages*

It has already been discussed that advertisement from Nelly.com are mostly not to the readers liking. There is a reason why so many bloggers choose to partner up with Nelly and advertise their products. Tradedoubler has partnered up with Nelly.com and pays up to 11 % of the total amount that the reader, in this case the customer, has spent on Nelly.com. In other words, the blogger gets up to 11 % of the amount of every order that has originated from his/her blog. (Nelly.com)

This means that basically anyone who wants to partner up with Nelly.com can do it. An issue that could be discussed here is, is Nelly.com too “out there”. Some signs can already be seen.

Other comments that the question got were:

- I do not mind advertising if it is clearly stated that the product was given to the blogger
- Ads which have nothing to do with fashion or things the blogger writes about
- Stuff or food supplies that are considered very healthy for you
- Nelly.com and other ads that have just been written so that the blogger gets something for free

14. Do you think that the bloggers are clear enough about when they are advertising something and when they are not?

The question had three possible answers: yes, no and sometimes. 94 % of the respondents answered that they sometimes think, that the bloggers are clear enough about when they are in fact advertising and when they are not. As declared previously, the Finnish law states that an advertisement has to be clearly marked and informed to the readers. According to the answers, the readers do not feel that that is being done

4 % answered that they feel that bloggers are clear enough and 2 % commented that they perceive that blogger never are clear enough.

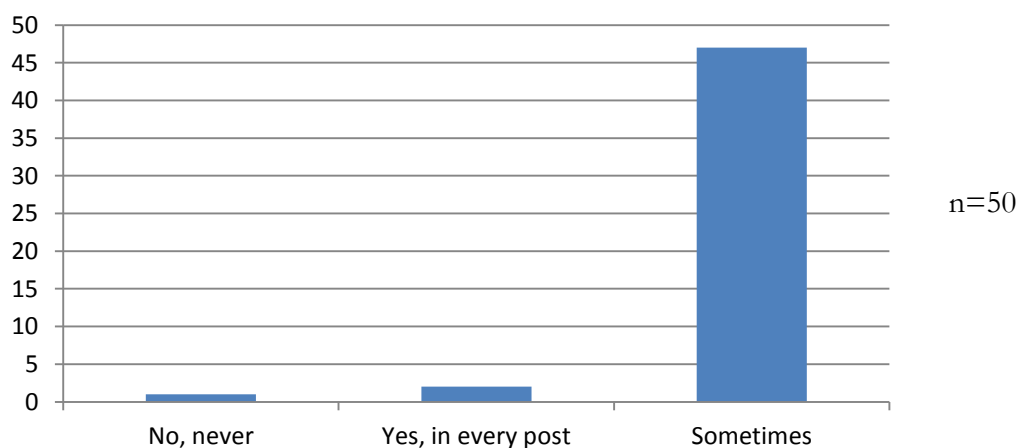


Figure 11. Do you think that bloggers are clear enough, about when they are advertising something and when they are not?

15. Would you prefer to read blogs without advertising?

82 % of the readers do not wish to read blogs without advertisement, but they would prefer lesser ads. 10 % answered that they would not like to read blogs that does not contain advertisement. 8 % commented that ad-free blogs would be to their liking.

This is good news for companies. There can be ads, but not too many. The difficult task will be to choose what kind of ads will be present in the blogs.

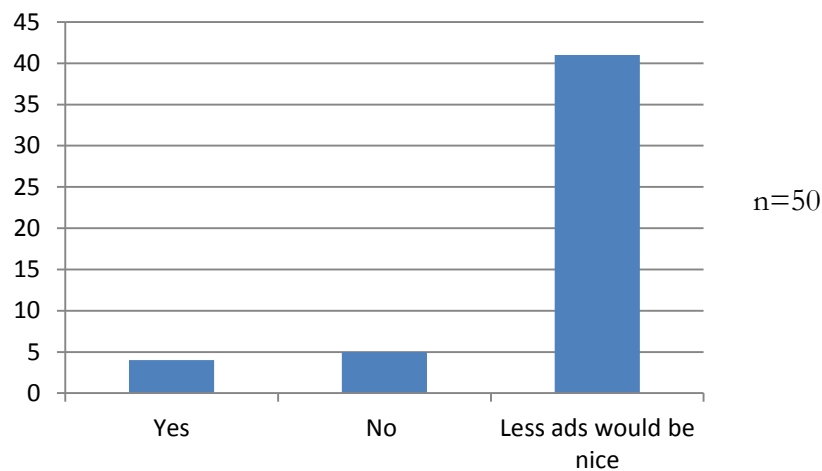


Figure 12. Would you prefer to read blogs without advertising?

16. If you have any other comments related to this survey, feel free to comment, otherwise thank you for answering.

The last question was an open question and did not require an answer. Seven respondents left a comment. The issues that the respondents had with the bloggers were mostly related to relatability and honesty.

- *It is hard to relate to bloggers who buy expensive stuff. For example a blog that I have been reading for about three years used to be kind of down to earth and now all she buys are expensive stuff, I stopped reading because I do not have money to buy the stuff that she buys, but I know that she probably gets lot for free*

- *I liked that bloggers gave tips on specially good products. Nowadays when they advertise about everything it is hard to know what they really like, I prefer to read less known blogs for this reason, they are not as “corrupt” as the big name bloggers*
- *It is quite funny when a company has made a deal with all the top blogger and they all post about the same thing within a couple of days, for example Nelly.com sales, Nellyholic.. it is quite annoying*
- *It is hard to relate to some bloggers that used to be relatable, when they receive and buy so expensive stuff, for example 1000-2000 euro handbags*
- *Some bloggers advertise anything for free, it is very annoying*
- *I would like the bloggers to advertise stuff they really like and they really believe is better than any similar*

One of the comments was positive against bloggers advertising products:

- *I like that bloggers advertise their favorite products. I know that probably the products are not their favorite every time, but I read blogs because of the products, so that I can get tips on what to buy and what not to buy*

8 The analysis

This chapter will focus on the analysis of the survey. It will also compare the results to the theoretical part. The research problems in this thesis are:

- How do the readers react to advertisement, is it perceived as positive or negative and why
- Why the readers read fashion blogs
- Do the readers buy the products that the bloggers advertise

8.1 The readers' thoughts

The main reason for reading fashion blogs is to get inspiration and tips. To get inspiration the blog has to for example contain pictures of beautiful things. An advertisement could also be a picture of beautiful things.

As described earlier, when a company understands how the consumer thinks the company will make money (M.R. Solomon). Companies have understood that young females between 20 and 29, read fashion blogs almost every day.

According to Statistics Finland the amount of females aged 20 to 29 in the end of 2012 was 332.052. In other words companies have the opportunity to reach over 330.000 females every day regardless where they live, since anyone anywhere can log on to the Internet and read a blog. (Statistics Finland 2013)

These days, trends are changing all the time. Designers create new collections for autumn, winter, spring and summer. As stated by J. Yurchisin and K.K.P Johnson, nowadays the process from the item being introduced, to adopted, to already being out of style is much more faster than it used to be which creates the need to get new items. A *real* need for a product might not even exist but a *want* for a product is often more powerful which makes the blog platform a perfect place to try to convince the readers to buy a company's products.

The readers do click on the links if the product seems interesting and when a product is highly recommended by the blogger. According to a research made by MediaCom 62 % of blog readers have changed their view of a company, a product or a service because of what they have read in a blog. (Katleena Korteso, 2012, 153). The readers still buy products that the blogger recommends, even though, they do not know, if it is the bloggers real opinion or not. As mentioned the readers are losing their trust for the blogger and the opinions, so the problem is already here. The issue in the future will be how to convince the readers that the opinion is the bloggers and not the company which is advertising.

As the survey concluded 66 % of the respondents do not mind that bloggers advertise products, but 82 % would also prefer to read blogs with less advertisement.

A “golden middle road” has to be found to keep the readers interested. As it is now, the readers are not satisfied with the amount of advertisement. It is too much. A problem that some of the respondents commented was that the trust and interest for a blogger decrease, if the blogger advertises something that has nothing to do with fashion or things that the blogger writes about, written so that the blogger got the product for free, the same advertisement is in every blog, it is not stated clear enough that the product was given for free and blogger is not relatable anymore because of the expensive products that she/he buys/get for free. It could be concluded that a blog is not anymore a *neutral* public source, or at least that is what the readers are feeling.

94 % of the respondents felt that bloggers only sometimes state clearly if the product is an advertisement. A statement could be made that a bloggers opinion about a product is not biased anymore, if the blogger receives free products for giving a company advertising opportunities and if she/he then posts about all the products. This is clearly a problem. Bloggers state that they already are informing the readers what is an advertisement and what is not, but the readers do not feel the same. The problem might also be that the readers do not understand what is advertisement and what is not, especially younger readers.

A problem did arise in one company's marketing tactic. Nelly.com is memorable since 26 out of 36 remembered Nelly.com advertisement, but 14 out of 29 consider the advertisement disturbing. As explained before, Nelly.com provides bloggers an affiliate marketing opportunity. Bloggers make collages out of their favorite products from Nelly.com, advertise when they have sales or "secret" sales and make collages of their new favorite products from Nelly.com. All of the examples mentioned above were mentioned in the question regarding which advertisements the readers consider most annoying. Nelly.com should at least consider changing the amount of people who can sign up for it and who can sign up for it.

Affiliate marketing is a quite new phenomenon in fashion blogs. Some readers might not even understand that by clicking and then purchasing a product, the blogger receives a percentage of the sum. It is also possible that the blogger gets compensation when the reader just clicks on the links.

It is quite difficult to know when a post is advertisement or does the blogger *really* like the product as much as she/he is saying. The post might say at the end "the blog post was written in cooperation with company x" or "the product was received for free" but this does not state whether or not it is the bloggers opinion or not. The blogger might say it is "the best product ever" but it is impossible to say. Nowadays it is hard or even impossible to know if the bloggers opinions can be trusted.

This problem has been noticed since new rules regarding the advertisements have been drafted. Even though the outline is done, the effect of it remains to be seen, since it is only a recommendation.

8.2 The future of fashion blogs

Fashion blogs are here to stay. Whether or not they stay as they are now is the big question. Fashion blogs with a lot of readers are becoming more like company blogs. They write less about themselves and more about products or services that they have tried. The humanity of the bloggers is slowly decreasing and it is being replaced by

advertisement. A blog is like an internet diary. It is not supposed to be filled with advertisements.

Bloggers are making a lot of money because of the advertisement. Are they going to be willing to sell their humanity for more collaborations and more money? Is it going to affect the amount of readers or increase it? Are fashion blogs in the future just going to be commercialized blogs where everything is from collaborations or from a company? How are the bloggers going to keep the readers interested? How is the trust for the blogger going to be kept if almost everything is advertisement? Will the bloggers start to lie about which products are free or from collaborations? How are the Finnish tax authorities going to handle the issue with free products?

The questions mentioned above are probable issues in the future. The issue that concerns the most is if the bloggers will start to lie about where the products are from due to the fact that they do not want the readers to think that they are advertising so much. It is already confirmed that there is too much advertisements but the bloggers will probably not want to let go of the compensation that they are receiving from the collaborations and, of course, all the free products that they receive.

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Appendix

Survey: Ads in fashion blogs

1) How old are you? *

- ☐ 15-19
- ☐ 20-24
- ☐ 25-29
- ☐ 30-34
- ☐ 34-

2) Occupation? *

3) Woman or Man? *

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man

4) Do you read fashion blogs? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5) How often do you read fashion blogs? *

- ☐ Everyday
- ☐ 5 times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once a month

6) Why do you read fashion blogs? *

7) What is/are your favourite fashion blog/blogs? *

8) Do you like that bloggers advertise products on their blogs? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9) How often do you click on the links to the product(s) that the blogger is advertising? *

- ☐ Every time I see something that I like
- ☐ Sometimes when the product seems interesting
- ☐ When the blogger writes that the product is the best product ever
- ☐ Never, I do not like that bloggers advertise products and link to the products
- ☐ Non of the above

10) Have you bought a product that a blogger has written about and recommended in his/her blog? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11) If you have bought a product, what was it?

12) Can you name companies that advertise on the blog/blogs you read?

13) Do you find that some ads are especially annoying? Which one(s)?

14) Do you think that the bloggers are clear enough, about when they are advertising something and when they are not? *

- ☐ No, never
- ☐ Yes, in every post
- ☐ Sometimes

15) Would you prefer to read blogs without advertising? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Less ads would be nice

16) If you have any other comments related to this survey feel free to comment, otherwise thank you for answering :)